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GAY LIFE

—IN—

PARIS.

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How Life is Enjoyed by the People of that Great Metropolis.

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THE QUEEN OF THE MABILLE.

GAY LIFE IN PARIS.

Preface.

There is an old Italian proverb, "See Naples and die," but the French paraphrase it in a more pleasant way and say "See Paris and pray to live there until the end of the world." It is with some of the females of Paris that we have to deal in this little book. Life in the great Metropolis is far different from the comparatively sober method of living in our American cities. A well known journalist says: "Men and women plunge into

the lovely city as into a bath of pleasure, buffet with the breakers, float a brief time on the cosy sea of life there, and are then sucked down in the dark and sinister depths where ruin, disease and death lay in wait for the prey they are sure of in the end." Of course this writer doesn't mean that all men and women get into the evil way, but he does mean that a greater proportion are tempted by evil in Paris than in any other place.

The Jardin Mabille.

The day of the Jardin Mabille went by several years yet, but the memories of it remain. The nearest approach to it, at present, is an establishment in the Latin quarter of Paris. The Mabille was a very elaborately and artistically arranged garden, a maze of thickets, odorous with flowers. It had an immense closed hall for winter use. Here once a week was held a masked ball which lasted from Saturday night to daybreak of the Sabbath. The wickedest dances, notably the can-can, and the hula-hula were invariably reserved for the closing hours of the affair. The women who frequented these balls were bad, yes, very bad, and they were met there by men in all walks of life. Even Napoleon III has visited this den of iniquity incognito. The writer of this had occasion to visit the Jardin Mabille and other similar places in Paris once in company with a detective.

One of the notable dances seen was the bacchanal or wine dance. It is accompanied with the most astonishing sensational effects. The gas burns low, loud gongs bray dismally, cymbals clash, and the hall is brilliantly illuminated with red and blue and green fires, amongst which pistols are discharged and shrieks are heard in various parts of the room. Never was madder scene enacted in real life than the bacchanal and the valentine on New Year's eve. But is it real life after all, or is it only Paris and a kind of giddy dream? We, who come only to look on and to renew our feeble, but I trust virtuous indignation at such sights, turn at last from the girls in boys' clothes and the boy in girls' clothes; from the jaunty sailor girl-boy who has just ridden around the room on the shoulders of her captain; from the Queen of Darkness who swept past us in diamonds and sables and never so much as suffered her languishing eyes to rest for a moment on any one of us; from the misery of the jealous one in the corner who has been robbed of his prize, and the melancholy of the two who are advising one another to go home, for they have each had more than enough; from all this we turn at last and find the streets blank and cold, and over the roofs comes the sound of bells that are calling the faithful to prayer.

As a resort the Jardin Mabille ranked about with the Sixth Avenue dives of New York. The general class of patrons were the same at both. The attractions are the loose women; the attracted the silly, young and old men.

I have encountered there grave American business men and government officials, and famous actresses and *prima donnæ*, bent on investigating the gilded vice for which the Mabille has become notorious. Indeed, the experience was said to be one without which one's knowledge of Paris was incomplete, and as long as the Jardin Mabille existed, it never lacked patrons to make its sugared infamy profitable. God be thanked that this vile institution is of the past, and it is our regret that some French Parkhurst does not arise and clean out the similar establishments whose gilded doors are open as the reader is perusing this.

A PAIR OF FRENCH DANCERS.

Ballet Dancers.

The reader may be supposed to be familiar with the architectural splendors of the Paris Opera House. To some minds these splendors will perhaps become more vivid when it is said that they cost 40,000,000 francs, say $8,000,000. I omit all general description and pass at once behind the scenes to the *foyer de la danse* or green-room of the ladies of the ballet.

It is a splendid room, decorated with allegorical panels and mirrors. All around the room run bars fixed against the wall, and covered with red velvet. The dancing "subjects" use these bars to stretch and twist their legs, and to exercise the muscles of their backs. Before the fireplace stand the children and small fry of the ballet. On each side of the fire, dozing and gossiping are the mothers of the figurantes, armed with baskets and knitting needles. In the middle of the room is a little group of men, hats in hand, carefully dressed, chatting, laughing, and apparently waiting for something.

They are the *habitues*, and they are waiting for the arrival of the *premiers sujets*.

Soon these ladies appear, one by one, walking with that movement of the hips that only dancers have, the foot turned outward and enveloped in loose gaiters, which make them look like Cochin

China hens. These gaiters are destined to preserve their satin shoes and stockings from dust and dirt. With a little watering-pot that they carry with their finger tips, like shepherdesses in Watteau's pictures, they proceed to water about three square feet of floor; then flinging into the glass a general and collective ogle at the group standing behind them, they go through a variety of steps, pirouettes, smiles and capers for five minutes.

Then comes a little repose. The group of men breaks up, and those who are intimate enough approach and talk to the dancers. What they say to them is a secret. Meanwhile, the call man cries with a voice like a rattle, "Gentlemen and ladies, they are beginning." This is not true. It is like saying dinner at six for half past. The incident, however, is useful to those ladies who wish to cut short a tiresome conversation. The reply is a caper.

After a few minutes the call man returns: "Gentlemen and ladies, they have begun."

This time it is almost true. Then the ladies take off their gaiters, hand the watering-pots to their mothers, to their chamber-maids, or to the persons who combine these two offices, and with much strutting and muscular mannerism direct their steps toward the stage.

Those who enjoy the privilege of the entry to the *foyer* of the opera are the subscribers, the Ministers, influential journalists, and a few other persons whom it pleases the director to gratify. All rich folk, you may be sure, for unless you are rich you cannot be an habitue of the opera. As Hector Berlioz used to say, "Music is essentially aristocratic, a girl of noble lineage, that princes alone can endow nowadays."

How Divided.

And now let me say a few words about the ladies of the ballet. They are divided into premiers, sujets, coryphees, figurants and comparses. I maintain the French terms for the simple reason that there are no Anglo-Saxon equivalents.

The *corps de ballet*, like an army corps, is composed of platoons, divided first of all according to the sexes, and then into quadrilles, first and second. The pay in the second quadrille is 700 to 800 francs a year; in the first, 900 to 1,000 francs; a *coryphee* gets 1,200, 1,300, or 1,400 francs. The next stage is *sujet*, with an engagement of three years and a salary beginning at 1,600 francs and increasing up to 2,000 francs in the last year.

These are the stages through which the members of the ballet of the opera pass. And what a hard time they have! Take, for instance, the *coryphees* and the members of the two quadrilles.

They arrive at the opera, say a quarter to 9 in the morning, each armed with a leather bag, containing a pair of stockings, some dancing shoes, a corset, a chimisette, a comb, a hand mirror, a button hook, a box of face powder, a piece of bread, two sardines, some potatoes, and a bottle containing more water than wine.

Each one climbs up to the fifth story and enters a room, where her comrades of the quadrille are dressing. In five minutes she has put on her class costume — low necked chimisette, with short sleeves, muslin skirt, rose-colored stockings, shabby satin shoes, a blue ribbon round her neck, and in her corset a bunch of brass medals, a piece of red coral, and two little crosses. These are her fetiches. No danseuse who respects herself can do anything without her fetiches or lucky charms.

Up two more flights of stairs, she arrives in the large square instruction room under the cupola, with the floor slightly inclined to reproduce the slope of the stage. The only furniture is a chair for the teacher, Mme. Merante, a chair for the violin player, Francois Merante, and all around the room bars such as we have already seen in the *foyer de la danse*.

"Take your places, young ladies!" cries Mme. Merante. The girls place themselves at the bar, and holding it now with the right hand and now with

the left, twist and dislocate their bodies in every possible fashion. This is only a preparation for the lesson proper. After these exercises, the teacher calls the pupils into the middle of the room, and then begin the figures and pirouettes. If our heroine is ambitious, she will not be content with the lesson alone, but undertake in a corner by herself a number of intricate and peculiar dislocations during the intervals of repose.

The lesson is over. It is 11 o'clock. The girls hurry to their dressing-rooms to change their linen, after which they breakfast in company on sardines, radishes, sour apples, gossip and fried potatoes. At noon the bell rings for rehearsal. The girls have to come down on the stage, and finish their breakfast while the stage manager calls out the names and the ballet master talks to the composer. The rehearsal drags along until 4 o'clock. Then the girls climb up again to their dressing-room, put on their ordinary clothing, and leave the theatre.

It is 5 o'clock by the time they reach their homes, where their mothers, worthy *concierges* or washerwomen, are waiting for their daughters to peel the potatoes for dinner. They have only time to wash, to hurry through their dinner, and return to the opera in time for the first act. A *coryphee*, for instance, will play a page in the

first act, appear in the second, and take part in the ballet in the third. During the fourth act she remains in her dressing-room, and does a little crochet, but hardly has she done a few points before the call man's voice is heard in the lobbies: "Ladies, the fourth act is finished." She changes her costume, scampers down the stairs, and rushes upon the stage. The curtain falls. The *coryphee* regains her dressing-room, puts on her ordinary clothes, and leaves the theatre. It is nearly 1 o'clock when she reaches her home, and, after eating a bit of bread and cheese while she undresses, she creeps into her narrow bed. Her day's work is over.

Hard Labor for Girls.

Indeed, there is but little poetry in the existence of the smiling and light-footed dancers whose pirouettes afford so much pleasure to the old gentlemen in the orchestra stalls. They begin often at the age of 5 or 6 in the *class des petites*, and then every day in the year they practice and toil and chatter and caper until from *rats* they become successful *figurantes* at the rate of one franc a night, members of the first and second quadrilles, *coryphees* and *sujets*. Then at the end of their first three years' engagement begins a period of bitter grief. For then it often happens that, instead of encouraging them and giving them a

decent salary, the administration of the opera chooses its stars from among foreigners.

A Borrowed Mother.

The *danseuse* always has a mother; if the fates cut the thread of the days of her natural parent, she will borrow, hire, or buy a new one. It is an article of primary necessity. The mother holds her daughter's shawl in the wings, watches her dance, covers her shoulders when her *pas* is over, and offers her a little bottle of cold beef tea to quench her thirst and keep up her strength. Take for a sample mother Mme. N., who begins her day as a fruit seller at 6 o'clock in the morning. She mounts into her little cart and trots off to the Central Market, where she lays in her provision of cabbages, turnips, carrots, and salads. Then, on summer evenings, about 8 o'clock, a tall lackey enters her shop, and Mme. N., dressed in her Sunday best, gets into Mons. de P's victoria and takes a ride in the Bois de Boulogne with her daughter. Mme. N. is a living encyclopædia, a gazette of the market and of the court.

French Female Beauties.

If you enjoy nice photographs of female beauties, here is your opportunity. For only ten cents, we will send to you forty photographs of the most charming French girls in tights. Each photograph is mounted on a card and the lot of 40 card photos makes an exquisite, unique and *petite* collection. Ordinarily, you know, pictures of actresses in tights cost ten cents each, but here we make the remarkable offer of forty separate card photographs. Send ten cents, silver or stamps, to Keystone Book Co., Box 1634, Philadelphia, Pa., or to the firm from whom you purchased this little volume.

Incident in a Dive.

One day when the writer of this was visiting one of the low dives of Paris, in company with a detective, the latter said to him:

"Do you see that fellow at the third right-hand table, reading a letter to a drunken woman? He is an ex-lawyer's clerk who has gone to the dogs through strong drink. He hangs round pot-houses and, for a drink, writes begging letters and bogus letters of reference for customers. Every time he is arrested for being drunk his pockets are full of well-written notes, addressed to prominent people, recommending meritorious cases of necessity to

their notice. The next table is occupied by two prostitutes smoking cigarettes, and a couple of sneaking blackguards who secretly sell obscene pictures and transparent cards on the boulevards. Still further on are a lot of the 'bankers' or hawkers, who sell newspapers and pamphlets with loud cries of 'Last night's murder!' or 'Frightful scandal—full and minute particulars!' Mixed in with them are street singers, street musicians and other Bohemians of the lowest class."

Unmasked.

On receipt of 30 cents we will send, postpaid, a large book entitled "Mabille Unmasked." It tells of the wickedest place in the world, how it was started, who have patronized it, and what has happened there. It is one of the greatest sensational books of the age. A notable feature is that it is full of pictures taken from life. Send 30 cents, stamps, to U. S. Supply Co., Box 329, Lynn, Mass. Another sensational book is entitled "Coney Island Frolics." It is profusely illustrated. Sent postpaid for 30 cents by U. S. Supply Co.

Deep in Sin.

At the entrance to the Rue de Trois Portes, the writer made a sudden move. "Here's a poor, ragged woman lying stretched out on the sidewalk. She looks as if she might be dead."

"Dead drunk," responded the Chief of Detectives, cynically. "Even animal life seems suspended. Do you detect a very loathsome smell? It is a combination of all the drinks and perfumes popular among women of her kind. She is still young—hardly thirty years old." Between her thick lips gleamed fine white teeth. She must have been pretty at one time.

"How disgusting she looks, all plastered over with mud."

"She is what they call a 'sidewalker.' "

"What's that?"

"It is the slang name for a class of prostitutes whose only home is the scaffolding round some old house that is being pulled down, or some new one that is being built. They carry on their trade in the open air under bridges, in the trenches of the fortifications, in back alleys, where there are no janitors. Once a week, regularly, this one fetches up in the station-house. She comes lawfully by her drunkenness. Her mother died in hospital of delirium tremens. Her father committed suicide while drunk. She herself has almost got to the end of her rope. Some day, coming out of a pot-house, she'll drop dead in the street, and then she'll be on show, for the last time, at the Morgue. Although known to thousands, nobody will claim her body, and she will be turned over to the medical school for dissection."

"What was her parents' business?"

"Her mother's trade could not be classified. Her father was a perambulating 'fence,' who used to peddle stolen goods from door to door."

A Hellish Babel.

A saloon called "The Senate" contained tables almost touching each other, at which customers, male and female, were packed like herrings in a barrel.

The uproar was something indescribable. Some were shouting, some were screaming, some were reciting obscene verses. Five or six indecent choruses were being sung at the same time. Language of incredible foulness was roared from one to another, shrieks of drunken laughter and the crash of broken glass were incessant.

To overhear one's neighbor, one had to bend his ear right to his mouth. The solitary waiter, sweating like a runaway horse, was in evil humor. Woe to the man who stood in his way.

Everything was paid for in advance, and all drinks cost 15 centimes (7½ cents.)

The decorations of this dive are its most remarkable characteristic—for the paintings on the walls, which were singularly well executed, were filthy and obscene beyond description. Human beings, male and female, were represented, life size, engaged in performances and operations which are never mentioned even among savages.

ADIEU—ALA FRANCAISE.